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**Highlands Council Announces Formation of Technical Advisory Committees**

Chester, NJ- The New Jersey Highlands Council announced today the formation of 18 Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) comprised of experts from an array of subject areas the Council must address in creating a regional master plan.

“The Highlands Council is delighted that these knowledgeable people have agreed to help us follow a planning process that is based upon sound science and informed, practical experience,” said Highlands Council Chairman John Weingart. “The Technical Advisory Committees will surely enhance the efforts of the Council and Council Staff.”

The 19 committees (see full list below) will focus on elements of the Regional Master Plan outlined in the Highlands Act, including: Resource Assessment, Financial Assessment, Local Government and Public Input, Coordination and Consistency, Transportation, and Smart Growth.

“These committees will act as local consultants in reviewing and commenting upon the scientific and technical basis for the Regional Master Plan,” said Morris County Freeholder Director and Highlands Council Vice-Chairman Jack Schrier. “This diverse group of experts will provide immeasurable assistance to us as we begin drafting the Regional Master Plan.”

TAC meetings, which will take place at the Highlands Council office at 100 North Road (Route 513) in Chester, will commence in mid-July and continue over the next several months.

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## TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE DESCRIPTIONS

**Water Resource Management-** The Water Resource Management Technical Advisory Committee is charged with identifying and establishing the location of and the quality and quantity of ground and surface water resources throughout, and in some cases beyond the limits of the Highlands Region. This Committee will focus on developing resource assessment methodologies that can predict a level of sustainable growth that adequately protects surface and ground water quality and supply. Additionally, this Committee will investigate means to enhance or restore impaired surface and ground water resources. The Committee will recommend areas that should be permanently preserved in order to protect water resource quality and supply. Finally, the Water Resource Management Committee will identify and assess the current water supply and wastewater infrastructure systems that would support or limit or promote development and redevelopment.

**Ecosystem Management-** The Ecosystem Management Technical Advisory Committee will identify and classify the natural resources within the Highlands Region and report on the relationship between these resources that include, but are not limited to floral and faunal species, communities and habitats, existing scenic attributes and critical treasures of the Highlands. This committee will develop resource assessment methodologies, strategies and policies that serve to preserve to the best extent practical contiguous forests, wetlands, stream corridors, steep slopes and critical habitat for fauna and fauna, and maintain the essential character of the Highlands environment. This Committee will identify special critical environmental areas and other critical natural resource lands where development should be limited or restricted altogether.

**Land Preservation-** The Land Preservation Technical Advisory Committee will explore ways to protect and sustain the critical lands within the Highlands region. The Committee will suggest and review criteria for preservation of land as defined by the Highlands Act. The Committee will also review the adequacy of current techniques, tools and resources to preserve land in the Highlands and recommend changes to existing approaches as well as innovative ways to address this issue. The Committee will also explore incentives for landowners to preserve their properties. The Committee will also address stewardship of preserved land to maintain the environmental values of the Highlands region.

**Land Use Planning-** The Land Use Planning Technical Advisory Committee will focus on the overall planning principles to be adopted and implemented through the Regional Master Plan. The Committee will consider and make recommendations on not just where

growth and redevelopment should be directed, but also how structures and surrounding lands should be arranged in the landscape. A key focus will be how the Regional Master Plan integrates within the existing structure of State, county and municipal plans, and the best techniques for ensuring implementation of the Regional Master Plan. The Committee will be challenged to be innovative and forward-looking in the interests of ushering in the best possible land use planning methods for the Highlands.

**Cultural/Historic Resources-** The Historic Technical Advisory Committee will help develop and review the results of a method to identify the important cultural, historical, and archaeological resources that make up the character of the Highlands region and discuss the stresses on maintaining the integrity of these resources. The Committee will explore creative ways to maintain these resources as well as to measure and convey the value of these resources to communities within the Highlands throughout New Jersey and surrounding states.

**Transfer of Development Rights-** The Transfer of Development Rights Technical Advisory Committee will bring their expertise in land use, property valuation, acquisition strategies, finance, and real estate markets to help shape the new Highlands TDR program. The Committee will discuss criteria for identifying possible sending and receiving zones within and outside the Highlands region. The Committee will recommend policies and procedures to make the program workable and understandable to private landowners and local officials.

**Sustainable Agriculture-** The Sustainable Agriculture Technical Advisory Committee will discuss the future of farming as an industry in the Highlands region. Issues to explore will include the economic value of the agriculture industry in the region, viability of farming as a sustainable means of making a living, stewardship of prime agricultural resources, such as soils, as prerequisite to maintaining farmland, and preservation of landowner equity for farmers. The Committee will also review the farmland preservation program to make recommendations on how the program can sustain agriculture in the Highlands region. The Committee will look for innovative solutions to keep farming a healthy industry in the Highlands region.

**Sustainable Forestry-** The Sustainable Forestry Technical Advisory Committee will discuss forestry practices in the Highlands district. The focus will be on the biodiversity of the forests, different silviculture practices, and methods of harvesting forests to improve the long term health of the Highlands forest ecosystems. The Committee will also suggest policies to help provide for a sustainable forest products industry into the long term future.

**Geographic Information Systems-** The Geographic Information Systems Technical Advisory Committee will identify what layers, analysis tools and methodologies are needed in the preparation of the Regional Master Plan. The Committee will help identify where this information exists, how it may be obtained and processed, and the best ways

to address sharing and standardization issues. The Committee will suggest the most efficient ways to use GIS to identify critical areas. They will also explore creative uses of the GIS technology, using both field-based (GPS units) and in-house software programs.

**Regional Development and Design-** The Regional Development and Design Technical Advisory Committee will consider each of the features, resources, constraints and pressures of the Highlands from a regional perspective. The Committee will consider how to foster a sustainable built and natural environment across the region as a means to foster local culture, character and resources. The Committee will consider regional impacts related to environmental, social, and financial conditions across the Highlands Region.

**Green Construction-** The Green Construction Technical Advisory Committee will share expertise and offer recommendations of methods, strategies and implementation tools to be included in the regional master plan to help foster the development of environmentally responsible structures and landscape elements. The Committee will investigate environmentally-innovative technologies which may be appropriate for use within the Highlands. The guidelines for LEED certified construction will be discussed and considered for inclusion as standards for development projects throughout the Highlands. Sustainable site planning and design principles will also be explored with the goal of adopting methods that will ultimately improve the ecosystem health of developed sites.

**Housing-** The Housing Technical Advisory Committee will consider housing needs in the Highlands, both for the quantity of housing and a range of housing types. The Committee will explore trends in housing, as well as the need for future housing. The Committee will also help to identify outstanding COAH obligations for affordable housing and make suggestions for how to meet those obligations. Additionally, this Committee will consider the location of existing infrastructure and the potential to accommodate additional housing need and identify where improvements may be necessary.

**Community Investment-** The Community Investment Technical Advisory Committee will focus on the types of community investment decisions local governments must address in guiding their towns and counties into the future and potential gaps between investment needs and available funding. The Committee will propose strategies to assist in long term community investment planning and will consider possible methods of cooperation between public-private partnerships and amongst towns and counties within the Highlands. The Committee will identify mechanisms for coordination efforts between the Highlands Council and local community investment needs over time.

**Transportation-** This Technical Advisory Committee will review and provide recommendations regarding the current traffic patterns, town centers, and destination areas as well as what transportation improvements are needed at this point in time and at maximum build out. The Committee will be forward thinking, considering future development and not solely the current state of the Region. This Committee will also be charged with exploring new ways to transport people to and from the Highlands Region, considering commuter rail, light rail, and road improvements, not only for weekly commuter traffic but also for bike, pedestrian and eco-tourism opportunities.

**Utility Capacity-** The Utility Capacity Technical Advisory Committee will help develop and review the results of a method to assess the current water and wastewater utility infrastructure capacity across the Highlands Region, emphasizing treatment and delivery capacity. (Note: a separate group is addressing transportation infrastructure.) The Committee will also help develop and review the results of a method to assess the potential and limitations regarding expansion of water supply and wastewater utility services that could support effort by those towns to develop, re-develop, fulfill their COAH obligations, and growth while staying within the range of the capacity of the current infrastructure systems. Finally, the Committee will review and discuss issues related to the costs and institutional issues of water supply and wastewater infrastructure management and, where appropriate, expansion.

**Eco-Tourism/Recreation-** The Recreation and Tourism Technical Advisory Committee will explore creative approaches to maintaining a healthy ecosystem while inviting the public to travel to and enjoy the benefits of the Highlands outdoors. The Committee will review and help assess the existing and potential benefits of eco-tourism, heritage tourism and agri-tourism to communities and the economic vitality of the region, and for developing increased public support for protection of the Highlands. The Committee will also explore how marketing and tourism may serve as a tool to support the region's infrastructure and communities.

**Brownfield Redevelopment-** The Brownfield Redevelopment Technical Advisory Committee will focus on the many issues associated with the identification, remediation and redevelopment of brownfield sites. The Committee will: discuss coordination with local municipalities and other appropriate agencies and programs to identify existing and potential brownfield and redevelopment sites throughout the Highlands region; assist in the establishment of criteria for identifying sites that are appropriate for redevelopment in accordance with the goals of the Regional Master Plan; and help identify how the Council can assist in the remediation and redevelopment process of sites through agency coordination, technical assistance and identification of funding resources. The nature of how these sites will be redeveloped while protecting the Highlands will include Brownfield to Greenfield programs, Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), and redevelopment as appropriate for economic sustainability.

**Education-** The Education Technical Advisory Committee will have a three different focuses: First, it will discuss how to educate public officials about the Highlands Act, and how the Act can be used to benefit their community through the TDR program, opting into the Preservation Area, and other land use options. The second focus will be methods of public education on how to apply the Act to their own land, be it through the TDR program, farmland preservation, and other conservation options. The final focus of the Education TAC will be recommendations for an education program for teachers and school children across the Region focusing on the importance of natural resource preservation, protecting land in their own back yards, and how they can protect New Jersey's Highlands for future generations.